

SFO 2005

San Francisco International Airport, seen in an aerial view, hasn't reached its full capacity yet.

# A place to land

FAA study says Bay Area airports must expand to meet demand

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Bay Area airports will need to expand their capacity by 2015 and work together to find regional solutions to air traffic congestion problems or face gridlock and serious delays, according to a report released by the Federal Aviation Administration on Tuesday.

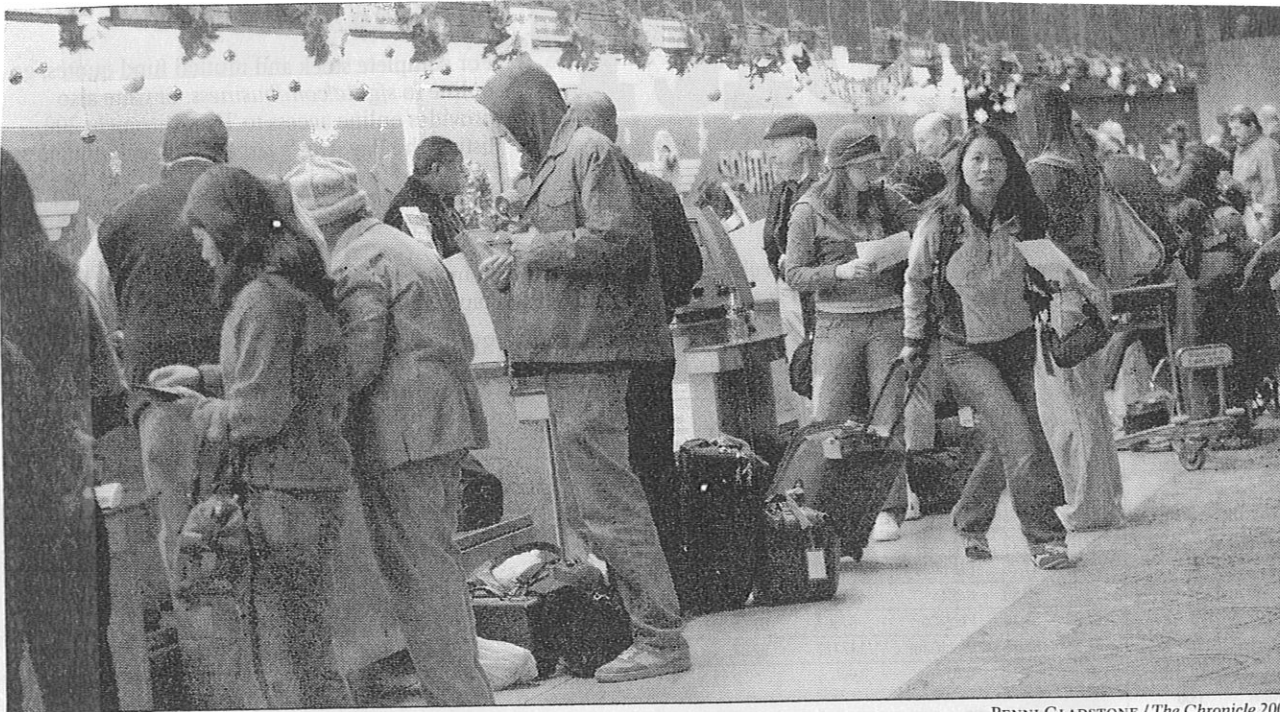
The Bay Area is one of eight metropolitan areas

that need to increase the number of flights it can handle by 2025, the report states, a task it says could be difficult because the region is hampered by "geographic, terrain and airspace issues" that limit its ability to add additional runway capacity.

Because of that, the report says, the region's airports should explore using existing smaller airports in the region to help take the burden off of San Francisco and Oakland, an option already being consid-

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**Holiday travelers jam** the Southwest Airlines counters at Oakland International Airport, which is identified by the FAA as in need of adding capacity.

PENNI GLADSTONE / The Chronicle 2006

# Region's airports need to expand

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ered, local airport officials said. The report also suggests using new technology to increase runway capacity, a measure that is already being considered at San Francisco International Airport.

The report, "Capacity Needs in the National Airspace System," is the FAA's second since 2004. It looks at the 291 commercial service airports and 223 metropolitan areas across the country to determine their needs in the next eight years.

The agency chose 56 airports for a more detailed analysis and worked with airport officials to determine what needs to be done.

In all, the report found that 14 airports and eight metropolitan areas will require additional capacity by 2015.

Oakland International Airport will need to add capacity in the next eight years, the report found, even with planned improvements such as the \$300 million, nearly completed expansion project that will add five gates and allow 18 million passengers to pass through the airport annually by 2010, up from 14.4 million in 2006.

Spokeswoman Rosemary Barnes said Oakland Airport, which has nearly tripled its passenger load since 1991, plans to add a terminal with between 10

and 20 gates, but will not add any runways.

"The FAA is showing that by 2015 . . . we will see delays on the airfield," she said. "So instead of Oakland focusing on building a new runway — because of environmental issues and costs, it's not that easy any more — we are working from a regional standpoint . . . to look at where airfield capacity can be added."

SFO spokesman Mike McCarron said officials are hoping to work with smaller airports, such as Concord, to increase the number flights to them. He said the Regional Airport Planning Committee — made up of officials from SFO, Oakland, Mineta San Jose International Airport and other regional transportation bodies — is already working on this option.

According to the FAA, San Jose does not have an immediate need to add capacity. The airport is in the process of expanding and improving terminals and runways.

Capacity problems result in delays throughout the air travel system, the report states. As the industry bounced back from a post-Sept. 11 slump, on-time arrivals at the nation's busiest airports have dropped from an average of 82 percent in 2002 to 75 percent in 2006.

SFO's on-time rate was 70.3 percent in 2006, according to the Department of Transportation,

compared with 76.9 percent in 2004. Oakland slipped from 81.2 percent in 2004 to 78.3 percent in 2006.

In the next 10 years, the report said, the Bay Area will "serve as an . . . example of a capacity-constrained metropolitan area where runway construction may not be an option. In these cases, demand management, regulatory or economic solutions and other market mechanisms need to be investigated."

Those options include relaxing some of the FAA's rules and utilizing improved navigation technology and landing capabilities as well as improved weather and traffic information, which could allow more planes to land at airports at one time.

McCarron said SFO is already considering some of these improvements. The airport's operations are often hampered by low clouds, which cut landing capacity in half, and it has installed a system that allows more planes to safely land when the cloud ceiling is as low as 2,100 feet.

On Tuesday, the airports commission voted to ask the FAA to lower that ceiling to 1,600 feet, he said.

But SFO is operating under capacity and has not yet reached the traffic levels it hit in 2000, when more than 40 million passengers used the airport, compared with an estimated 33 million this year.

## More flights, people

Projected annual passenger and airline operations

### SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

2007 — 33 million passengers, 307,000 departures and landings  
2008 — 38.4 million passengers, 350,000 departures and landings  
2011 — 42 million passengers, 400,000 departures and landings  
2016 — 48 million passengers, 450,000 departures and landings

### OAKLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

2006 — 14.4 million passengers, 160,600 departures and landings  
2010 — 18 million passengers, 197,830 departures and landings  
2025 — 30 million passengers, unknown number of departures and landings

Source: Oakland and San Francisco airport projections

And one terminal at the airport is vacant while it is being remodeled, he said.

"Our short-term challenge is to get 14 to 15 new domestic gates (in that terminal) open by 2016," he said. "Our runway capacity is OK right now."

The airport is also considering charging airlines more to land during busy times as a way to space flights more evenly throughout the day.

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